INTRODUCTION TO POLITICAL INQUIRY
Tu, Thu: 10.20-11.10 plus sections on Thursday and Friday

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DESCRIPTION

The central purpose of this course is to familiarize students with the basic principles of social scientific research and their application to the study of politics. This class is about the challenges facing those intent in talking seriously about politics and what the options available to cope with these challenges are. What is a good question? How to develop a theoretical argument? How to test it? How do I link arguments to data? What is the appropriate set of methodologies to answer a particular research question? How can I tell the difference between good and bad scholarship, between a good research design and a faulty one? What data do I use? What is a good indicator? When am I at risk of running circles? What do I need statistics for? Why should I be cautious about it? What is the room for historical case studies in political science? Can we really talk about cause and effect in the political world? These and other related questions are the object of this class.

In addressing them, the course is structured along the different stages of the research process. Before analyzing each of these stages in detail, we shall introduce some basic notions from the philosophy of science, paying some attention to the nature of causal relationships and how to approach them. In this context, we shall discuss the implications from the “science” in political science. As a result, we will spend some time learning what differentiates (or at least should differentiate) political science from other approaches to the study of politics such as classical political history or political journalism.
The first, and perhaps most important, step in a project is the selection of the research question. Bad questions are a recipe for disaster. Not every question is worth exploring as, to put it with Voltaire, “the secret of being a bore is to tell everything”. But then, what makes for a good question? What passes for a puzzle worthy of time, talent and money? What are the trade-offs associated with different types of questions?

Once an interesting question is in hand, the next step is to develop an argument to answer it. This brings us to the issue of theory development. Here we will discuss what the elements of a good theory are, introducing notions such as assumptions, logical consistency, parsimony, causal mechanisms, derivation of hypotheses, and empirical implications. The central point is learning how to think analytically. Along the way, we will spend some time discussing the pros and cons of rational choice as an instrument for theory generation in political science.

A good theory will generate a set of interesting hypotheses. The next hurdle is to test these hypotheses empirically. As easy as this may sound, this task gives way to a series of challenges that will occupy a good deal of our time during the semester. Simply put, many things can go wrong. We will focus on the following issues:

1. Gathering and constructing information: from concepts to data; operationalization; measurement issues; constructing indicators.

2. Hypothesis testing: core vs. alternative hypotheses; the logic of comparison; problems of identification; sources of bias; selection of observations; direction of causality.

3. The promise and perils of different methodologies in coping with these issues: experimental and quasi-experimental designs; small N analysis; large N statistical analysis. Correlation vs causation. The problem of causal inference across different methodologies.

The study of the different sections of the course will combine abstract treatments of the relevant theoretical and methodological issues with actual applications of these principles to a particular subfield. Attending sections is both required and particularly important. Sections are devoted to discuss more in depth applied examples of the material for the week. You would benefit a great deal from reading in advanced the applied readings indicated below, as they constitute background material for the class’ sections on Thursday and Friday.

COURSE MATERIALS

As we go through these topics, students will be asked to master materials from the following texts:


In addition, there are a number of readings required every week. These include extensions on the concepts discussed in class (you are responsible to study these readings in preparation for the exam along with class materials!!) and the applied examples to be analyzed during the sections.

**COURSE REQUIREMENTS**

The final grade in the course will be a function of four items:

1. A mid-term **in class** exam (February 21st) covering the materials of the first 5 weeks of the semester. This exam constitutes 30% of the final grade.

2. A second midterm **in class** exam (Tuesday April 24th). This exam constitutes 30% of the final grade.

3. A short research proposal (10 page maximum). This assignment constitutes 30% of the final grade. We expect the projects to abide by the following guidelines: (1) the project will have a clear research question, motivated in relation to the existing literature in the subfield; (2) To answer your question you will lay out an argument of your own, discussing its premises, internal logic and causal mechanisms. Do not panic! We know this is likely to be your first assignment of the sort! (3) From the theory, you will derive the relevant hypotheses and empirical implications; (4) Thereafter, the paper will discuss the specifics of the research design and methodological strategy; (5) Ideally, the proposal will show some motivating evidence and preliminary findings. The topic will be entirely of your choice. **It must be something that interests you.** The only boundary is that it needs to be a political science question and it needs to apply some of the methodologies discussed in class. There are plenty of resources in campus for you to access necessary data for these projects. A few good places to start are:

- Duke Library Resources: [http://guides.library.duke.edu/political-science](http://guides.library.duke.edu/political-science)
- SSRI Data Services: [http://www.ssrri.duke.edu/dsc.php](http://www.ssrri.duke.edu/dsc.php)
- ICPSR: [http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/](http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/ICPSR/)

Aaron, Chris and I will be available during office hours throughout the semester to address any questions regarding the development of the research proposal. Proposals are due in class on April 24th before the second midterm. See policy below concerning late papers. Please plan ahead and start early. To facilitate the
process, you are expected to submit a one page outline of your idea by January 24th, 2012 so that we can provide feedback on the early stages of the project. In developing this assignment, it is worth to carefully read Jim Stimmson’s note on academic writing (“Professional Writing in Political Science: A Highly Opinionated Essay” www.unc.edu/~jstimson/Working_Papers_files/Writing.pdf)

(4) Participation .....10%

Each of the requirements of the course is graded on a 0-100 scale and weighted according to the criteria above. Final grades will reflect the following scale:

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<th>Grade</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93-100</td>
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<td>A-</td>
<td>90-92.9</td>
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<td>B+</td>
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The official date for the final examination is Friday May 4th from 7-10 pm. This date provides an opportunity for those who missed either of the midterms for legitimate reasons to be examined. If you take the two midterms in the dates listed above, you do NOT need to take the final exam. If you have provided a legitimate reason to miss either of them, then you need to take the final exam on May 4th. To miss a midterm exam legitimately, you need to contact me as soon as possible to discuss your reasons and always prior to the exam. See policy below as to what constitutes a legitimate reason to miss an exam or assignment. The final exam is cumulative and covers all the material for PSC 102.

EXTRA CREDIT: RESEARCH POOL PARTICIPATION

The Department of Political Science runs a subject pool for lab experimental work. If you choose to participate in this pool, you will receive extra credit of one percent on your final grade for each hour you participate, up to three percent. In other words, if you volunteer three hours in the lab, you will receive three percent extra credit; if you volunteer two hours in the lab, you will receive two percent extra credit.

The Political Science Research Pool (PSRP) is a password-secure website that administers and facilitates the participation of students in ongoing Political Science research. It enables students to voluntarily sign-up for studies, monitor completed hours,
and contact study researchers with questions. Participation in the pool gives you exposure to ongoing research projects. To that end, we specifically require all research projects using PSRP to provide information about the study, and to make themselves available to interested classes to present results.

If you would like to participate, please register with Melanie Freeze, who you can contact at: msw12@duke.edu.

**POLICY**

I follow Duke University’s procedures to establish whether absences from any event related to this class are justified (e.g. illness, sport events) and merit ad hoc arrangements. Other than in the very restrictive cases contemplated by the university, make up exams are not an option.

I also follow the University’s policy in any event of plagiarism and academic dishonesty.

**Grade complaints:** You have the right to dispute a grade if you disagree with it. You must do so in writing, no more than 3 working days after we have returned the exam to you. Upon receiving your appeal, I will re-grade the entire exam. Note that as I re-evaluate the exam, I may realize that while we were too strict with some answers, we were too generous with others. Your overall grade may go up, but it may also go down.

Finally, I accept no late papers. All late papers will be punished by one letter grade for every day that they are late. In other words, an “A” becomes a “B”, if the paper is one day late; the “B” becomes a “C” after two days, etc.
COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 January 12: Introduction to the course. Goals, organization and the plan ahead

** NO SECTIONS THIS WEEK**

Week 2: January 17, 19: The Scientific Method. Political Science as a Social Science

  Johnson and Reynolds (JR), Political Science Research Methods, chapter 2.

  King-Keohane-Verba (KKV), Designing Social Inquiry, chapter 1

  Recommended:

  Hempel, Carl G. 1966 Philosophy of Natural Science, Chapter 1-2


Week 3: January 24, 26: Questions, Puzzles, and Paradoxes. Knowledge accumulation, research programs, and innovation.

  Johnson and Reynolds (JR), Political Science Research Methods, chapter 3 (60-65)


  Recommended


  Sections: Overview of Major Breakthroughs in the Study of American Elections (supplemental materials provided during sections)
Week 4: January 31, Feb 2: **Tools for theory development: what does a good theory look like? Hypothesis generation.**

Johnston and Reynolds (JR), Political Science Research Methods, chapter 3 (65-77)

King-Keohane-Verba (KKV), *Designing Social Inquiry*, chapter 3 (selections)

Jon Elster *Nuts and Bolts in the Social Sciences*


**Recommended:**


Hempel, Carl G. 1966 *Philosophy of Natural Science*, Chapter 3-4

Sections: *Are the main explanations of the electoral behavior in America good theories?*(supplemental materials provided during sections)

Week 5: February 7, 9: **Rational Choice as a tool for Theory Development.**


**Recommended:**


Applied Readings for Sections: Why do people vote?


Donald P. Green and Ian Shapiro 1994. Pathologies of Rational Choice Theory, Yale University Press. Chapter 4


Week 6: February 14, 16. Concept formation, Measurement, and Operationalization. An applied example. Some remarks on the importance of concept formation and operationalization.

Johnson and Reynolds (JR), Political Science Research Methods, chapter 3


Recommended:


Applied Readings for Sections: What is democracy?


Week 7
Tuesday February 21: 1st Midterm Exam.

Thursday February 23: Taking Stock. The Road Ahead
Week 8 February 28, March 1: **From Theory to Data: Causality, Research Design and the Logic of Comparison**

Gary King et al. *Designing Social Inquiry*, chapters 4,5,6


**March 2-March 12: Spring Break**

Weeks 9: March 13, 15 **Small N**


**Applied Readings for Sections 1: the Analytic Narratives project**


**Applied Readings for Sections 2: When do Revolutions Occur?**


Barbara Geddes 1990. “How the Cases you choose affect the answers you get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics” *Political Analysis* 2, 131-150.


Week 10 March 20: **Experiments I**

Johnson and Reynolds (JR), *Political Science Research Methods*, chapter 5

Applied Readings for Sections:


Week 11 March 27-29: **Experiments II**


Applied Readings for Sections:


Week 12 April 3-5: **From experiments to the statistical analysis of observational data. Generalizability. The role of inference in the study of politics. Criteria for Inference. The common logic across different methodologies.**

Johnson and Reynolds (JR), *Political Science Research Methods*, chapter 5 & 10

Applied Readings for Sections:


Week 13 April 10-12: **Hypotheses testing and Statistical Significance**

Johnson and Reynolds (JR), *Political Science Research Methods*, chapter 11

King-Keohane-Verba (KKV), *Designing Social Inquiry*, chapter 3 (selections)

** NO SECTIONS THIS WEEK. Midwest Political Science Associations Meetings**

Week 14 April 17-19: **The Promise and Perils of Survey Analysis**


**Applied Readings for Sections:**


**Tuesday April 24 Tuesday: Second Midterm**

**Friday May 4th 7-10 pm: Final Exam (see above).**